

5 Steps to Improve Water Efficiency on Client's Landscapes



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As Steve McCarter, the national water efficiency products manager of [Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply](#), explains, it is dangerous to assume that simply taking cholesterol medicine will result in a significant drop in cholesterol levels. Unfortunately, this medicine will have little to no impact if you continue to eat hamburgers every day for breakfast. The same goes for improving water efficiency. You can install all kinds of devices and new technology, but none of that will help if you are still making the same mistakes. Water conservation can and has been achieved, if contractors execute irrigation plans properly. With water efficiency now a bigger concern than ever in the industry, *Turf* spoke with various experts in water management to learn the top five things you can do, in tandem, to increase your water efficiency.

How can I improve water efficiency on clients' landscapes?

Don't overlook basic equipment checks.

Any little break or tear in equipment can produce a large amount of unused water. It may sound obvious, but neglecting to routinely carry out maintenance check-ups is the leading cause of water waste in a system. This step must come first, no matter how you decide to proceed following this surveillance.

Burnett Jones is the senior marketing manager at [Toro](#), a company creating products for the landscape industry, including smart remotes and sensors. Before investing in irrigation controllers, Jones suggests thoroughly surveying the property. According to him, this is the initial and most important step to avoiding water waste.

"[Check] that they don't have any cracks or broken products ... and that means

pipes, beams, fittings, valves, diaphragms, systems, anything that would allow the water to go where it's not intended to go by the irrigation controller," Jones recommends.



Pay attention to your sprinklers and soil.

Once you have examined the state of the property and equipment, make sure the smart irrigation devices actually work properly. Similar to the basic equipment check, this step alone will not completely improve general water conservation, but it is an integral step in the entire process.

Devices such as irrigation controllers direct how and when sprinkler heads operate. They do this either by basing it on weather trends or by basing it on the soil moisture level. In that case, to properly work, they need the right equipment and products to control. McCarter explains how inefficient sprinkler heads and poor soil composition can throw off the entire process of water conservation.

"Just a smart controller with sprinkler heads throwing water in the street doesn't really save you water. Not having a sensor on there that allows it to irrigate while it's raining doesn't either," McCarter explains. "Having poor soil that's heavily compacted and can hardly get water to penetrate it is a challenge."

Gene Ebertowski, the operations manager of [FloraTerra Landscape Management](#) in San Jose, California, has spearheaded the water conservation initiative at his company. Ebertowski mirrors McCarter's thoughts when it comes to the role of quality soil and sprinklers in water efficiency. Ebertowski also mentioned how contractors can better equip sprinklers to run effectively on all sorts of terrain.

"When you have a site where you have various elevation changes and you run the sprinklers, typically the water from the pipes will drip down to the lowest head, especially on a slope. By putting check valves on that sprinkler head, we can get some water conservation," Ebertowski says. "When the head closes, there's a little stopper in the bottom that plugs it to keep the water from draining out of the pipe."

Understand pressure regulation.

While it is important to check the terrain you are dealing with when it comes to sprinklers, it is also vital to assess the pressure of the nozzles. Ebertowski states that stabilizing really high pressure can get you a 25 to 30 percent savings on your water.

"Having the right pressure going through your nozzles for a spray or a router is critical for water savings. If you have too much pressure going through, then you have misting, and water is wafling through the air and going outside of the intended area, so you are losing water there," Jones says.

That little extra spray may seem like no big deal, but the wasted water adds

up in the long term. Fixing high water pressure is an easy fix with large results.

Consider precision-based products.

Finally, all of the equipment checks and maintenance are done. Updating the systems and products should only occur once you have guaranteed that original systems are in check. There are a number of things on the market to increase water efficiency, but certain products, especially emitters, have made a particularly large impact on water conservation.

Ewing highly recommends investing in point source or in-line drip irrigation. Both are irrigators that are focused on direct application of water. Point source drip emitters apply water slowly and directly, and in-line drip irrigators allow water to drip directly into the root. Obviously, this direct application of water leads to less water waste because the water is going only where it needs to go.

Like Hunter, Toro also manufactures and distributes precision- based mechanisms. Most of the irrigation product distributors are offering this type of merchandise, and they all come with their individual benefits. Jones discusses Toro's precision product on the market now. "We offer two lines of nozzles for a typical sprinkler body or a spray head that are focused on saving water," he explains.

According to Toro's website, the nozzles that "generate more uniform droplets" use up to 35 percent less water, and Water Wise Now states that drip emitters are 20 percent to 45 percent more efficient than the traditional sprinkler system.

The great thing about these products? You are not only seeing significant water savings, your wallet will be hurting less, too.

"There is a way to save water and save your lawn as well," Jones explains. "The technology that is out there both in control and in distribution is such that people can save significant amounts of water."



Invest in water saving technology.

Now to move on to the most fun step of increasing water efficiency: incorporating technology. The biggest things on the market today are wireless irrigation controllers running on WiFi. These devices manage irrigation based on weather trends and soil moisture levels, and they can be controlled straight from any wireless device. If the rest of the irrigation system is running properly, these products can possibly improve water savings by up to 70 percent. These controllers have already made huge strides in the water conservation industry, and, according to Ebertowski, they are only going to get better.

"Most of the irrigation companies have stepped up their game. They are continually investing money in research and development," Ebertowski says.

"They are able to come up with better products through advanced engineering."

McCarter reminds contractors, however, that simply installing a controller is the not the panacea to water conservation. The biggest tip of all is to routinely review and update clients' irrigation systems to yield the best water management results.

"I think that message was the same five years ago," McCarter stresses. "I think if you went back maybe seven to 10 years ago when smart controllers first started coming on the market, that was seen as, 'Hey, here's the magic bullet that takes care of all of it,' and I think we've come to learn that that's only one element; you've got to do all of these things."

So just like with cholesterol medication, irrigation controllers will not improve water issues unless you take other preventive steps.